

Baptism: Participation in the Death and Resurrection of Christ



Thrust Statement: **Baptism is the means whereby an individual participates in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 6:3-10; Colossians 2:12**

The subject of baptism has divided Christendom into various warring factions. Is baptism immersion or is it sprinkling or is it pouring? Are there three modes of baptism in the New Testament? Are all three methods valid as far as biblical baptism is concerned? As one approaches the mode of baptism, one observes that most bodies (churches) of believers practice pouring or sprinkling instead of immersion, which practice (sprinkling/pouring) is not found in the New Testament writings. Just a perusal of baptism in the New Testament reveals that the symbolism of baptism is best portrayed by immersion. Since baptism is closely associated with the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ, immersion is the most accurate symbol of the Gospel of God. In baptism, one immediately recognizes that baptism is a sensible sign of putting off the old person and putting on the new person. When one receives biblical baptism, one signifies that he or she abandons the old life and enters into a new one. It is in this vein that Paul writes: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (**Galatians 3:26-27**).^[1]

Within Christendom, the so-called baptizing (sprinkling or pouring of water) of infants is common practice among many sincere believers. Yet, in the New Testament writings, baptism only applied to grown men and women who heard the Good News of salvation by grace through faith. Another issue that confronts the church today is the essentiality of baptism in the life of men and women. What is the purpose of baptism in the scheme of redemption? The debate still rages over the essentiality of baptism and its mode. The question is often proposed: can one be saved without water baptism? Also, some Christians demand that one understands “forgiveness of sins” as prerequisite for Scriptural baptism; otherwise, baptism is null and void. Many Christians, within various fellowships, will not accept someone’s baptism unless it is performed by one of their own

party, and some will not acknowledge one's baptism as valid unless he or she understood "for the forgiveness of sins" before immersion.[\[2\]](#)

As one seeks answers to the enigma, or mystery, of baptism, one should begin his or her investigation with John the Baptist's baptism as well as the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Matthew begins his Gospel with an introduction to the ministry of John, which ministry began with a call to repentance and baptism (**Matthew 3:1-12**). Mark sets in motion his Gospel with opening remarks about the "beginning of the gospel about Jesus" and then proceeds to describe the ministry of John with his emphasis on "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" [εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, eis afesin Jamartiwn] (**Mark 1:1-4**). Luke also commences his Gospel with a reference to the ministry of John the Baptist: "He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" [εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, eis afesin Jamartiwn] (**Luke 3:3**). Both Mark and Luke add the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins." After the death of Christ, one observes Peter on the Day of Pentecost—the birthday of the church, or new community of God—also proclaiming baptism in the name of Jesus for the "forgiveness of sins" [εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, eis afesin twn Jamartiwn] (**Acts 2:38**).[\[3\]](#)

What does baptism for the "forgiveness of sins" mean or convey? Perhaps, the mystery can be more readily understood if one begins with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Since John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, one wonders why Christ submitted to water baptism. This knowledge of Jesus' sinlessness caused John, too, to question Jesus about His request for baptism (**Matthew 3:13-14**). Jesus' response to John is one of the most controversial of His remarks. Jesus said to John: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness" (**3:15**). Unfortunately, Matthew did not give an explanation of what it means, "to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus' baptism, so it seems, points toward the end, that is to say, the Cross, by which means He was able "to fulfill all righteousness." In order to accomplish salvation for men and women, He united Himself in solidarity with the human race. The most logical explanation of Jesus' comments about His baptism centers on Himself as the Suffering Servant of God. In other words, Jesus is baptized in view of His death as atonement for the sins of the world, which sacrifice brings about forgiveness of sins for those who believe. After the sacrifice of Christ, Christians, too, are baptized with a view toward forgiveness of sins in and through the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. Christ's baptism looked toward the future; on the other hand, Christian baptism looks back to the Cross.

Thus, Jesus' answer to John the Baptist—πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην, plhrwsai pasan dikaiosunhn, "to fulfill all righteousness—acquires a precise meaning. Jesus goes to the Jordan so that "all righteousness might be fulfilled." Jesus' baptism is related not only to His δικαιοσύνη (dikaiosunh, "righteousness") but also to humanity. In His baptism, He identifies Himself with His people. Paul expresses this truth this way: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (**2 Corinthians 5:21a**). Why was this necessary? Paul explains: "So that in him we might become the righteousness of God" [ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ, Jhmeis genwmeqa dikaiosunh qeou en autw] (**5:21b**). Later, Paul wrote to the Romans about the necessity of the atonement, which death upon the Cross enabled God to demonstrate His righteousness in the Crucifixion of Jesus. Paul writes with insight as he seeks to uncover the mystery of the

Gospel hidden from the foundation of the world:

But now righteousness from God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, dikaiosunh qeou), apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.²² This righteousness from God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, dikaiosunh qeou) comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,^a through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (**Romans 3:21-26**)

As one approaches the baptism of Jesus, one is conscious that His baptism pointed toward the end of His ministry upon Calvary in which all baptisms find their fulfillment. For Jesus to submit to baptism, this act, in and of itself, portrays His suffering and death in order to bring about righteousness for lost humanity. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, sets forth God's wisdom of sending Jesus to "fulfill all righteousness" by becoming "righteousness" for the believer. Pay attention to Paul as he discloses God's wisdom in the sending of Jesus: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**).

For one to advance the notion that His baptism meant to suffer is not pure speculation. Both Mark and Luke give the comments of Jesus concerning His ultimate baptism—death on the Cross for the sins of the world. Mark informs his readers that Jesus on His way to Jerusalem predicted His death (**Mark 10:32-34**). Following this revelation, both James and John sought places of honor in the kingdom. Jesus informed both brothers that they did not really know what they were requesting. At this point, Jesus asked: "**Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with**" (**10:38**)? They answered, "We can" (**10:39**). Then Jesus said to the brothers: "**You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with**" (**10:39**). Luke, too, narrates another incident in which Jesus speaks of His death as a baptism: "**I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed**" (**Luke 12:50**). In both cases, Jesus speaks of His death—a death represented by baptism. Jesus will complete the general baptism for all humanity in His atonement. Jesus is baptized in view of His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection.

Following the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus, He instructed His disciples to make disciples of all nations (**Matthew 28:19**). In this command, Jesus instructed the disciples to do two things: (1) "**baptizing them in the name** (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα, eis to onoma, "into the name") **of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**" (**28:19**) and (2) "**teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**" (**28:20**). Mark also records the commission this way: "**Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned**" (**Mark 16:15-16**). Baptism is associated with belief. For baptism to be

effective, one must believe and repent. Jesus' baptism pointed to the future, and, after the Cross, the believer's baptism points to the past—the Cross of Jesus. Baptism for the believer is a baptism into the Death of Christ. It is in Christian baptism that one participates in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ. John, too, gives a brief description of some of the events that transpired at the time of Jesus' baptism and, at the same time, his commentary upon the events. Listen to John the Baptist as he reflects upon this event, which scenario is recorded by John (one of the Apostles):

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”³² Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’”³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.” (**John 1:29-34**)

In order to set the stage for a clearer understanding of baptism as it is presented in this discussion, a few comments about the very heart and kernel of baptism is appropriate. Jesus' baptism in water prefigured His ultimate baptism in death in order to bring in “righteousness” for the one who believes. After the Cross of Calvary, baptism is now, for the believer, a baptism into the death of Christ. Christian baptism is founded upon the life of Christ and goes back to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Even though one may not understand the full implications of baptism and its relationship to salvation, the following comments should enhance one's appreciation for baptism in God's scheme of redemption. For example, in baptism, one experiences the end of the old aeon and the beginning of the new aeon. In Christ, one becomes a new creation. It is through baptism that Christ's death becomes the death of every believer. In other words, the Christ event—death, burial, and resurrection—is present in the baptismal event. Another insight about baptism is that in baptism, one is transferred to Christ and is, at the same time, submerged in His death. For one to be buried with Him in baptism is a seal of the believer's dying with Him.

One can say without reservation, Christ's death is my grave. In baptism, God, through the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, opens for every believer a new life. Again, to be buried with Him is a seal of the believer's dying with Him. In baptism, Christ takes the penitent sinner into His own Death and Life. When believers share in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection, they die to sin and come alive to righteousness. The baptized person is one who believes that he or she has eternal life through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. The new life for every Christian can only occur in the deed of Christ Himself—His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection. It is “in” and “through” baptism that one experiences participation in Him. Also, one can say that in baptism, one is incorporated into the Body of Christ. Christians ought also to look to the rite of baptism as their dedication of the new life in and through Jesus.

As one examines the many cases of baptism in the New Testament, one can

appreciate why every believer submitted to baptism. Baptism plays a very important role in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew begins his Gospel with John's baptism of repentance and the baptism of Jesus, and then he concludes his Gospel with the final words of Jesus to His disciples about baptism. For example, Matthew, after his introduction, begins the ministry of John the Baptist with his emphasis on baptism ([Matthew 3:1-12](#)). Immediately following John's call for repentance and baptism, Matthew records the baptism of Jesus ([3:13-17](#)). It is significant, as just stated, that Matthew not only begins his Gospel with the baptism of John, but he also concludes his book with Jesus' command to His disciples to baptize. Since Matthew begins and ends his book with baptism, then, it must have played a very important part in the ministry of John and of Jesus.

After the death of Jesus, one observes a new status in baptism. In other words, baptism is the entry of individuals into the new community of Christ. Christian baptism had, from the beginning, the concept of one's induction into the Body of Christ—the new Israel of God. In baptism, one becomes so united with Christ in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection that one dies to sin and rises with Him to a new life. One can say that baptism marks the entry of each individual into the community of the Assembly of God's anointed One on earth. This brings one to the question: can one accept or reject Christian baptism at will? Is baptism essential for one's response to God's salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus? As one seeks to understand Christian baptism, one must ask another question: is baptism from heaven or from men? If it is from heaven, can one obstinately refuse baptism and still be saved? Is rejection of baptism a dismissal of God's counsel? Is baptism a sign of God's grace and forgiveness? These are questions that every one ought to reflect upon in one's decision to follow Christ. During the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, He questioned the chief priest and the elders of the people about John's baptism. The Holy Spirit, through Matthew, records the following conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders:

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" ([Matthew 21:23-25](#)).

It is obvious that John's baptism came from heaven, not from men. For one to reject Christian baptism—God's heavenly design for the believer—is to thrust aside the counsel of God. Baptism is one means of responding to God's grace. Baptism should quicken the faith of every individual who identifies himself or herself with Christ's Death, Burial, and Resurrection. Can one reject, or decline, the baptism commanded by Christ and receive salvation? Is it wrong to discard, or abandon, God's counsel? Luke summarizes this rejection of John's baptism by the religious leaders when he writes with pungency, or sharpness:

All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for

themselves, because they had not been baptized by John ([Luke 7:29-30](#)).

When the Pharisees and the experts in the law discarded baptism, they cast off God's purpose for themselves. When one renounces Christian baptism, one too, declines to consider God's purpose for himself or herself. One might also ask the question: is Christ's baptism from heaven or from men? If it is from heaven, and it is, then, why not acknowledge that God's way is right and be baptized? When one is baptized in the name of Jesus, one acknowledges God's way of salvation in and through the finished work of Christ upon the Tree is right. In the Great Commission, as cited above, Jesus commanded His disciple to baptize believers into the name of the trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)). Just a perusal of the books of the New Testament reveals the role that baptism plays in the conversion of thousands in their response to Jesus as Lord. Luke, in the Book of Acts, narrates a significant number of baptisms in the early phases of the Christian church. Were the baptizers acting on the command of Jesus? Could baptism be rejected or accepted just on the whims of the people? Was baptism from heaven or from men?

BAPTISM: A SEAL OF ONE'S REDEMPTION

There are clues, here and there, that one gleans from Scripture in seeking to understand the various ramifications in Christian baptism. A study on baptism would be incomplete without a brief analysis of circumcision in relationship to Abraham's justification in [Romans 4](#). Was Abraham justified by faith or did circumcision justify him? Did circumcision play a role in his justification? Was he justified by faith before circumcision? Was circumcision a seal of that which had already taken place—justification?^[4] As one reflects upon Abraham and his circumcision, one is quickly aware that Abraham was only seventy-five years old when God justified him through faith ([Genesis 12:4](#)). Twenty-four years after God entered into a covenant with Abraham, He gave him circumcision as a sign of that covenant ([17:10](#)). Circumcision, according to Paul, was a seal of that which had already taken place [justification by faith] ([Romans 4:11](#)). Christian baptism is the counterpart of Jewish circumcision that God gave to Abraham four hundred and thirty years prior to the Law of Moses.

Just as Abraham's circumcision was a sign or seal of God's covenant with Abraham, so Christian baptism is a spiritual circumcision, which circumcision represents God's seal of the New Covenant—God's forgiveness of sins. According to Paul, baptism symbolizes the Gospel of the Resurrection ([Romans 6:3-4](#)). In baptism, one observes from Scripture that baptism is not just simply "bare symbolism," not just something expressive of faith, but rather, in baptism, something is actually accomplished. In other words, when one receives Christian baptism, he or she passes into the Spirit-controlled community and shares in the new life ([6:4](#)). Olive Wyon's comments about symbols are pertinent and informative. She writes with insight as she seeks to capture the very essence of symbols in the scheme of redemption: "Real symbols are not 'mere convention'. They are full of meaning; they point towards a transcendent reality. The symbol is not *invented*; it is born, not made. It does not merely *signify* reality; it *embodies* reality."^[5]

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

The primary thrust of this essay is to detail examples of baptism in the Christian

community following the Day of Pentecost. The Day of Pentecost illustrates the necessity of symbols acted out in one's response to Jesus as Lord. The new humanity of God needs symbols to compass the inexpressible things of one's experience. Perhaps there is a sense in which one confesses that the highest cannot be spoken with exactness, but rather it must be acted out to capture the very kernel of the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus. In baptism, one becomes conscious that the Gospel of God is a Gospel of Divine action in time. In the symbol conveyed in baptism, the message of salvation comes to its focus and is made plain. Men and women did not choose the symbol of immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins, but rather, God did the choosing.

In baptism, one can look back at that moment of his death with Christ and say, "He forgave me all my sins." Baptism, even as the Lord's Supper, is the visible word, that is, a moving actuality that represents God's grace. In baptism, one is reminded of God's action in reaching out to men and women through grace. Baptism proclaims what God has accomplished for humanity. Christ redeemed lost humanity, and baptism is the divinely given sign of this fact. When one is buried with Jesus in baptism, one experiences the foundation of his or her certainty of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The late editor of Ensign, R. L. Kilpatrick (1927-2004), once told this writer, "When confronted with doubts about my salvation, I remind myself that I have been baptized, which is the foundation of my certainty."

Some citations from the Book of Acts should shed some light on the attitude of the first century church as to the importance of this Christian institution. For example, on the Day of Pentecost, Luke informs Theophilus that Peter, in response to an inquiry from his audience, replied to the penitents, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" ([Acts 2:38](#)). Luke further states: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" ([2:41](#)). Did Peter tell them to do what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission?

On that day, Peter "warned them" and he "pleaded with them" to save themselves "from this corrupt generation" ([2:40](#)). Did any respond? Yes! As stated above, "Those who accepted his message were baptized" ([2:41](#)). Do you want to save yourself? Then, why not do what they did? They gladly accepted the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus and were baptized the same day, which baptism announced to those present that they had accepted God's way of salvation in and through Jesus ([2:41](#)). Their acceptance of baptism symbolized, as stated above, the Gospel of the Resurrection. Just a brief reflection upon the act of baptism reveals that this act is an outward embodiment of what the Gospel of God really means. Baptism is a gift from God; it is a sign of God's grace.

In baptism, the Pentecostal converts accepted God's purpose for themselves. Through repentance and baptism, they acknowledged that God's way was right and identified themselves as a part of God's elect. [Acts 2:38](#) reveals that there are two commands and two promises. The two commands are: repent and be baptized. The two promises are: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Forgiveness of sins" is not a part of the command; forgiveness of sins is an executive act of pardon that takes place in the mind of God, not what one does for God. If one repents and is baptized, he or

she receives forgiveness of sins and receives the Holy Spirit as an earnest (ἀρραβών, arrabwn) of one's guarantee of eternal life (**Ephesians 1:13-14**). One's baptism is one means of knowing that one has accepted God's message of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon the Tree. Have you accepted this message of salvation by submitting to Christian baptism? If not, why not? Remember, baptism is a dying and rising with Christ. Peter sets forth the concept that baptism is also the acknowledged way into the new community (**Acts 2:47**).

THE PEOPLE OF SAMARIA

Luke also records the preaching of Philip in Samaria and the response of the people: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (**8:12**). Luke mentions one of the Samaritans by name—Simon (**8:13**). In fact, he says, "Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw (**8:13**). Their submission to baptism demonstrated their acceptance of Philip's message about Jesus. It is in this vein that Luke writes about the reaction of the Apostles in Jerusalem: "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them" (**8:14**). Again, baptism signified their acceptance of Philip's message of the Good News about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus.

Today, how do individuals know if one has accepted, or received, the message of salvation? Is it not through repentance and one's baptism? Do you, too, believe the message proclaimed by Philip? One cannot read the eighth chapter of Acts without a realization that baptism is the proper response to the Good News of God's kingdom. One way for one to display, or reveal, to the church and to the world that one acknowledges the message of salvation in and through Jesus is by submitting, or yielding, to baptism. In baptism, one identifies himself or herself with Him. In baptism, one witnesses, as it were, the Death, Burial, and Resurrection in miniature. The human act of baptism becomes the effective symbol of the Divine act of redemption. Immersion in water brings together, as it were, the effective symbolism of the historical event on Calvary—His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection.

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Following Luke's attention about the work of Philip in Samaria, he then turns his attention to another conversion—the Ethiopian eunuch, which conversion came about through Philip sharing with him the atonement of Jesus as presented in **Isaiah 53**. This story is found in **Acts 8:26-39**. In this scenario, one is allowed to peer, as it were, into the conversion of this Ethiopian eunuch. After Philip's explanation of **Isaiah 53**, the eunuch requested baptism (**v.36**). How did the eunuch know about baptism? Did Philip tell him about baptism during the course of his conversation? Was baptism essential for his obedience? Was the eunuch baptized? What does the record say? Listen to the following dialogue between Philip and the eunuch:

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water (εἰς

τὸ ὕδωρ, eis to Judwr) and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water (ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος, ek tou Judatos), the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing (**8:36-39**).

In some vivid way, the baptism of the eunuch symbolized the Gospel message. In other words, baptism was the embodiment of the κήρυγμα (khrugma, “message” or “proclamation”). Just a perusal of this pericope (Philip and the Ethiopian), as observed above, one witnesses the Ethiopian reading from **Isaiah 53 (8:30-33)**. At this point, one hears Philip beginning with this prophecy concerning the coming Messiah and explains to him “the good news about Jesus” (**8:35**). Once again, how does one know that the eunuch accepted this Good News about redemption through the finished work of Christ? One knows that he acknowledged this message of salvation by grace in and through Jesus by his baptism (immersion). Sprinkling or pouring (common methods of so-called baptism among many Christians) do not fit the scenario concerning the biblical act of baptism, which baptism is immersion, as is set forth in the Scriptures. Pay attention once more to the biblical account of the eunuch’s baptism. Luke reports that as both men rode together in the chariot, the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized” (**8:37**). Upon Philip’s hearing this request, Luke writes (pardon the repetition):

And he (Philip) gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. (**8:38-39**)

It is significant that Luke gives the details about the eunuch’s baptism. For example, “both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water.” Again, he says, “they came up out of the water,” which statements convey the idea that baptism is not pouring or sprinkling water on the head of the person desiring baptism. Baptism is immersion. The major words used in the New Testament to describe this experience are the Greek words βάπτισμα (baptisma, “baptism”) and the verb βαπτίζω (baptizw, “to dip, immerse, submerge, baptize”). Baptizw is actually an intensive form of the verb βάπτω (baptw, “to dip, immerse”). Baptism involves a burial; on the other hand, sprinkling does not involve a burial. Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians, writes: “Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (**Colossians 2:12**). Once more, Paul to the Romans refers to baptism this way: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death” (**Romans 6:4**). The Greek word suggests immersion or submerging under water.

When the eunuch requested baptism, he identified with the Good News of God. Also, one can say that in his baptism he committed his life to Jesus. One’s baptism also portrays one’s hope for resurrection and eternal life. As one reflects upon Christian baptism, one is conscious that baptism symbolizes the first step toward living one’s life for God. When one is baptized, one participates in the Body of Christ, that is, in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection. In the New Testament, baptism is associated with repentance as well as the washing away of sins, or forgiveness of sins (**Acts 22:16; 2:38; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**). W. F. Flemington’s comments about **1 Corinthians 6:9, 11** are informative about the relationship of forgiveness associated with baptism and the moral life of holiness following baptism:

He (Paul) goes on to give examples of the flagrant immoralities for which Corinth was notorious even in pagan eyes. Once some of them practiced these things. But now that is all over and done with! Something happened to them when they became Christians. They were washed in the water of baptism: that meant cleansing from sin, consecration to God's service, being "put right" in God's sight. In other words, A Christian who lives an immoral life is utterly belying the meaning of his own baptism.[\[6\]](#)

SAUL OF TARSUS

One of the most notorious persecutors of the Christian church was Saul of Tarsus ([Acts 9](#)). Following his encounter with the Lord Jesus, he continued his journey to Damascus. Following his three-day blindness ([9: 9](#)), God sends Ananias ([9:10](#)) to restore his sight and to allow Paul to be filled with the Holy Spirit ([9:17](#)). Immediately following the restoration of his eyesight, Luke says, "He got up and was baptized" ([9:19](#)). Why did Ananias tell him to be baptized? Was it because the Lord had commanded him to be baptized? If he had refused baptism, would he have rejected the counsel of God? Have you yourself rejected the counsel of God by not being baptized as a believer? In spite of the negative overtones by some Christians concerning forgiveness of sins associated with baptism, nevertheless, baptism is associated with repentance and remission of sins.

In fact, Ananias told Paul: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash (*ἀπολούσαι*, *apolousai*, "washaway") your sins away, calling on his name" ([22:16](#)). Since baptism is closely associated with the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ, the act itself calls to mind the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ. Baptism is itself a powerful symbol of God's means of forgiveness. One cannot read the New Testament writings without a consciousness of the connection between baptism and Jesus' Death and Resurrection, which baptism symbolizes one dying to sin and rising to a new life in Christ. In addition to this symbolism of death, burial, and resurrection, one also observes the motif, or theme, of cleansing, which includes both forgiveness of past sins and liberation from the power of sin. Another motif associated with baptism is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the early church marked a new beginning, or new status, for every believer—entry of the individual into the new community of God's chosen people.

If one wishes to understand more fully the position of Paul and his baptism, one should read the Book of Galatians in which Paul develops the theme of justification by faith. Justification is based on faith, not works of law. Listen to Paul as he discusses the subject of justification:

We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' ¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. ([Galatians 2:15-16](#))

Paul did not discount baptism as relevant in the scheme of God's redemption for humanity. In the third Chapter of Galatians, he illustrates justification by faith. In order to nail the coffin shut, so to speak, he calls forth Abraham to prove that justification is

through faith, not works. Again, he writes: “Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith’ (3:11). After his discussion of Abraham’s seed (Christ), he explains:

But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.²³ Before this faith (τὴν πίστιν, thn pistin, “the faith”) came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith (τὴν πίστιν, thn pistin, “the faith”) should be revealed.²⁴ So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ^b that we might be justified by faith.²⁵ Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. (3:22-25)

The Authorized Version (KJV) renders the translation as “But before faith came” (3:23), which translation is somewhat misleading. Faith existed in the Old Testament, but “the faith” is faith in Jesus as the Messiah. How does one become a child of God? Paul’s response is quite revealing: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, dia ths pistews en Cristw Ihsou, “through the faith in Christ Jesus)” (3:26). Even though one becomes a child of God through faith, baptism is still the point of clothing oneself with Christ: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (3:27). Just as circumcision made one an Israelite, so baptism makes one a Christ’s man or woman. It is at the point of baptism that one becomes united with Christ. It is at the place of baptism that the believer professes his or her faith in Christ. In baptism, God, on His part, accepts one’s faith and gives to him or her His Holy Spirit as an earnest, or guarantee, of salvation. When one is baptized “into Christ,” one takes on the character of Christ. Christians are dead to sin, but, at the same time, they are alive to God. The body one bears is no longer a body of sin. One who is baptized is one who believes and hopes in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. For the one who is baptized, there is a constant direction toward God in his or her daily walk with God. When one is baptized, there is included in this death, burial, and resurrection a new being, that is to say, a new life.

CORNELIUS THE CENTURION

Luke also records another case of conversion that involved the command of baptism—Cornelius the centurion (**chapter 10**). After the appearance of an angel in a vision, Cornelius was instructed to send for Simon Peter (**10:5**). When Cornelius sends for Peter, Peter responds to the call and leaves the next day for Caesarea (**10:22**). Upon Peter’s arrival, he begins to speak:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God

raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him (πιστεύοντα εἰς αὐτόν, pisteuontas eis auton, “believing into Him”) receives forgiveness of sins through his name (10:34-43).

Peter associates “forgiveness of sins” with belief in Jesus (10:43). During Peter’s speaking, Luke says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message [τοὺς ἀκούοντας τὸν λόγον, tous akouontas ton logon, “the ones hearing the discourse”] (10:44). Then, Luke records the astonishment of those who had accompanied Peter to the house of Cornelius: “The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God” (10: 45-46). Did they receive “forgiveness of sins” when they believed on the name of the Lord? Did they receive the “Holy Spirit” before baptism or after baptism? Were Cornelius and his household the children of Hell when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them? Did God pour out His Spirit upon children of the Devil? Did this phenomenon of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit exempt them from Christian baptism commanded by our Lord? The answer is no! Baptism, undoubtedly, is the act of initiation into the New Israel of God. In other words, baptism meant entering into the redeemed community of God’s *ekklesia*, or church. In baptism one is brought into a new and supernatural environment—the new Israel of God. Baptism is a constant reminder of God’s grace—forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus upon Calvary.

There are no easy answers to all the questions set forth by godly men and women as they seek to understand baptism. Just a perusal of this unique case of conversion, one is left with many questions concerning the point of baptism. For example, were they accepted by God before baptism? The answer is no doubt in the affirmative. Yet, even though God accepted them before baptism, this favorable reception did not relinquish them from their obedience in baptism, which Jesus commanded. Again, one might inquire, were their hearts purified by faith or by baptism? Sometime later, Peter, at the Jerusalem Council, addressed this issue of Cornelius’ conversion with the following analysis, which analysis does not mention baptism:

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (Acts 15:7-9)

Since they had been accepted by God and their hearts “purified by faith,” then “Peter said, ‘Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name

of Jesus Christ” (10:47-48). Is this not what our Lord told the Apostles to do in the Great Commission? Oscar Cullmann (born 1902), Lutheran theologian, is right on target when he writes:

The event of Golgotha stands from the point of view of time and salvation in the same relation to the event of Baptism as to the event of the Eucharist. This means on the one side that baptism is no kind of repetition of that historical once-for-all event, but an ever new event, which, whatever a member is ‘added,’ reminds us that salvation history continues in the present time, On the other hand, it means, of course, that this present event is entirely determined by the once-for-all event at Golgotha, the ἐφάπαξ (efapac) of the centre of time.[7]

Sometime later, Peter addressed a group of believers (Apostles and elders) in Jerusalem (Acts 15) concerning God’s method of justification. After some discussion, Peter discussed the reception of the Gentiles into the family of God. Luke records the following editorial comments along with the words of Peter concerning Cornelius’s conversion and justification before God (pardon the repetition):

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” (Acts 15:6-11)

Even though they were baptized (Acts 10), nevertheless, Peter does not dwell upon water baptism as the point of acceptance with God. God who knew the heart of Cornelius and his household demonstrated His acceptance of them by pouring out on them the Holy Spirit. Also, Peter focuses upon faith as the means of God cleansing their hearts, not baptism. He says that God “purified their hearts by faith” (τῇ πίστει καθαρίσας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν, th pistei kaqarisas tas kardias autwn, “by cleansing the hearts of them”). One can say that in baptism one is subjugated, or under God’s control, to His righteousness and His sanctification. In baptism, participation into His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection is gained. Through this act, one is incorporated into the Body of Christ.

LYDIA’S CONVERSION IN PHILIPPI

Luke, in his narration of Paul’s second missionary journey, tells about the conversion of Lydia and her household (16:11-15). Upon their (Paul, Luke, and his companions) arrival in Philippi, a Roman colony (16:12), they inquired about worshipers of the one true God. In their investigation, they discovered that a group of women were outside “the city gate to the river” (16:13). In this narration of Lydia’s conversion, one is conscious that she publicly responded to Paul’s message of salvation by submitting to

Christian baptism. Baptism is one means of one's knowing that an individual has accepted the message of salvation based upon the finished work of Christ upon Calvary and, at the same time, signifies one's commitment to Jesus. Luke writes,

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us (**vv.13-15**).

CONVERSION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

Once when Paul, Luke, and his companions "were going to the place of prayer" (**Acts 16:16**), they were met by a "slave girl who had a spirit" (**16:16**). As a result of the slave girl following them for several days, "Paul," says Luke, "became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!'" At that moment the spirit left her" (**16:18**). As a result of this exorcism, the owners of the slave girl seized Paul and Silas and "dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities" (**16: 19**). This resulted in their imprisonment and the stripping of their clothes followed by a beating (**16:22-23**). Ultimately, an angel of God interfered with a "violent earthquake" (**16:26**) that shook the very foundations of the prison (**16:26**). This resulted in the opening of the prison doors and the chains came loose that bound the prisoners (**16:26-27**). Luke says,

The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family (**vv.27-34**).

How did the Philippian jailer demonstrate that he, too, accepted this message of salvation? How soon before they were baptized? Was it two weeks later? Was it a month later? Did they wait until several responded to the Good News of God before baptism? If baptism is so unimportant, as advocated by many Christians, then, why were they baptized "immediately" in the same 'hour of the night'? Does this sound ridiculous? Why the same hour of the night? Does this baptism remind one of the commands of Jesus in **Matthew 28:18-20**?

BAPTISMS IN CORINTH

Following their release from prison, Paul and Silas traveled to Thessalonica ([Acts 17:1-9](#)), then, to Berea ([17:10-15](#)), next, to Athens ([17:16-33](#)), and, finally, Paul arrives in Corinth ([18:1](#)). During Paul's stay in Corinth, Luke writes, "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" ([18:4](#)). As a result of his proclaiming the Good News of God's kingdom, Paul baptized Crispus and many of the Corinthians: "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized" ([18:8](#)). Do you believe in the Lord? If so, have you been baptized? If you wish to commit your life to Jesus and demonstrate your acceptance of God's message of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, you should respond to the message of salvation by accepting Christian baptism.

APOLLOS' AND JOHN'S BAPTISM

Apollos was a learned man and a man "with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" ([Acts 18:24](#)). Even though, in the words of Luke, "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John" ([18:25](#)), he still did not understand the baptism of the Great Commission. As a result of this lack of proper understanding of Christian baptism, Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos "to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" ([18:26](#)). This is given as an introduction leading up to Paul's engagement with certain ["about twelve men in all"—[19:7](#)] These particular believers in Ephesus knew only the baptism of John ([19:1-7](#)).

Since they had not been baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus" ([19:5](#)), they were baptized again: "Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.' He told the people 'to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" ([19:4-5](#)). If baptism is nonessential, then, why were they baptized again? Is it because of the command of Jesus in [Matthew 28:18-20](#)?—"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" ([28:19](#)). If baptism is from above, and it is, how can one reject the counsel of God? Why not demonstrate one's faith in the Good News of salvation by grace through submitting oneself to Christian baptism?

CONCLUSION

Even though one may not understand the full implications of baptism and its relationship to salvation, the following comments should enhance one's appreciation for baptism in God's scheme of redemption. For example, in baptism, one experiences the end of the old aeon and the beginning of the new aeon. In Christ, one becomes a new creation. It is through baptism that Christ's death becomes the death of every believer. In other words, the Christ event—death, burial, and resurrection—is present in the baptismal event. Another insight about baptism is that in baptism, one is transferred to Christ and is, at the same time, submerged in His death. For one to be buried with Him in baptism is a seal of the believer's dying with Him.

One can say without reservation, Christ's Death is my grave. In baptism, God,

through the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, opens for every believer a new life. Again, to be buried with Him is a seal of the believer's dying with Him. In baptism, Christ takes the penitent sinner into His own Death and Life. When believers share in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection, they die to sin and come alive to righteousness. The baptized person is one who believes that he or she has eternal life through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. The new life for every Christian can only occur in the deed of Christ Himself—His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection. It is in and through baptism that one experiences participation in Him. Also, one can say that in baptism, one is incorporated into the Body of Christ. Christians ought also to look to the rite of baptism as their dedication of the new life in and through Jesus.

[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[2] This author, Dallas Burdette, speaks from experience. A Baptist minister baptized me as a teenager. Years later, I came under the influence of my uncle (E. H. Miller, 1909-1989), associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school Church of Christ. He informed me that I would need to be baptized again, which I did. After preaching for about five years in this movement, I responded to baptism again because I was not sure that I understood baptism to be “for the forgiveness of sins,” still in the one-cup movement. For an analysis of this view, see Dallas Burdette, “Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> (accessed 8 August 2006) located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under BAPTISM.

[3] As one undertakes the study of baptism, one has to take seriously the particular context in which the subject is mentioned or discussed. The Scriptures cited in this essay on baptism come from various and particular contexts. Christians often seek to reconstruct the texts on baptism to coincide with one's traditions. This essay is number four in this series. Even though there is some overlap from the other three, nevertheless, this paper focuses upon a particular aspect of baptism—participation in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus.

^a25 Or as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin

[4] For a detailed discussion of baptism as a seal of one's redemption, one will find this in-depth discussion in Chapter 2 of this series (Baptism: Acknowledgement That God's Way Is Right).

[5] Olive Wyon, *On the Way* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), 17.

[6] F. W. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 54.

^bOr *charge until Christ came*

[7] Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, Studies in biblical Theology, First Series, (London: SCM Press, 1950, reprint, 1973), 35.